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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that drug use tends to increase during the college years, implying that college students have a more favorable view of drug use than high school students. To compare the attitudes of high school (N=367) and college students (N=260) toward nine recreationally used drugs, a semantic differential technique was used. Statistically significant differences were found between the groups for attitudes toward LSD, heroin, opium, and amphetamines, with high school students taking a more favorable attitude toward these drugs than college students. This finding is not in agreement with previous research and may reflect immaturity and lack of experience in the high school students. The fact that no significant differences were found for the most commonly used drugs, i.e., alcohol and marijuana, may reflect societal views regarding social acceptability, and the wide acceptance of marijuana and alcohol use among diverse segments of society. Another factor which may be involved is the increasingly frequent use of these drugs by young people. (AC)

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A Comparison of High School and College Student Attitudes Toward Recreationally-Used Drugs

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Abstract

High school and college students' attitudes toward nine recreationally-used drugs were assessed using the semantic differential technique. Statistically significant differences between the two academic groups were found for attitudes toward LSD, heroin, opium, and amphetamine. No significant differences were found for the most commonly used drugs, alcohol and marijuana.

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Review of Literature

Use of drugs among young people of high school and college age is widely prevalent and involves use of many different drugs (Clayton, 1979). Most studies of high school students have focused on marijuana and alcohol abuse (Blackford, 1975; Marihuana and Health, 1976; Rice, 1981) and have involved the study of deviant populations (Cohen & Klein, 1970; Kaplan, 1978).

Apparently little attention has been given to assessment of attitudes toward recreationally-used drugs among normal populations. One of the few studies of this type with a high school student population is reported by Blum & Associates (1969), who used open-ended questions as a means of determining student attitude associated with drug use. Reasons for using drugs were classified as follows: rebellion-hostility, pressure-escape, self-exploration, religion, curiosity-conformity, kicks, and creativity. The rebellion-hostility attitude was found to be most common; its focus varied from attacks on the researchers, to attacks on society and the legal system.

Blum and his colleagues found that students attending predominantly upper-middle class schools used drugs more frequently than did students from predominantly middle-class and lower middle-class schools. In addition, they found that drug attitudes were not independent of socioeconomic status or subject gender, in that boys were more frequent users than girls. These male-female differences were greater for middle-class and lower-middle-class students than for upper-middle class students.

Because the Blum, et.al. (1969) study was carried out in the late '60's, their findings do not reflect current views but rather those held by large segments of the popluation during the '60's. For example, they found that 41 percent of their subjects had relatively positive views of LSD. Today most people have been informed of the dangers associated with LSD use and the possibility of brain, chromosonal, and psychological damage.

In regard to studies of drug use among college students, research efforts seem to have been directed toward the study of a wider variety of drugs than is true for research in the area of high school drug use, investigations of which have tended to focus on alcohol and marijuana abuse. Research in the area of attitudes of college students toward recreationally used drugs is meager, most researchers having focused on patterns of use and factors associated with drug abuse. For example, Levy (1973) investigated drug use among college students as a function of year in collete and found an increasing use of marijuana, psychadelics, and the amphetamines during the first three years followed by a decline in the fourth year. Tobacco, alcohol, and tranquilizers were used with increasing frequency during

all college years and use of these three drugs remained at a high level following graduation from college. Extensive use of drugs among college students has been shown to be related to an unconventional life style, social orientation (Rice, 1981), socioeconomic level (Levy, 1973), academic major (Greenwald & Luetgert, 1971; Levy, 1973), and religious affiliation (Ginsberg & Greenley, 1978; Levy, 1973).

In summary, use of psychadelics, amphetamines, tranquilizers, alcohol, and marijuana appear to increase during the college years (Levy, 1973; Rice, 1981). These results seem to imply that college students have a more favorable view of drug use than do high school students. In order to investigate this ussue more fully, the present study was designed to compare attitudes of high school and college students toward nine recreationally-used drugs: alcohol, LSD, marijuana, cocaine, Valium®, heroin, hashish, opium, and amphetamines.

Method

Data were gathered for 627 subjects. Three hundred and sixty-seven of these people were students enrolled in a racially-integrated parish high school in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana. The remaining 260 subjects were students enrolled in one of two racially-integrated colleges located in northern Louisiana, Northeast Louisiana University or Louisiana Technical University. Most students enrolled in these three schools come from middle class families. The majority are white. Approximately two-thirds of the subjects from each school were female.

A 14-item adjective pair semantic differential was constructed to measure student attitudes toward various recreationally-used drugs. Target words (concepts) for each semantic differential consisted of drug names: alcohol, LDS, marijuana, cocaine, Valium®, heroin, hashish, opium, and amphetamine. Table 1 presents the 14 items of the semantic differential.

Results of factor analyses of data sets carried out in a previously conducted study (McGuire, Minder, McAnulty, & Minder, 1982) showed that attitudes toward the nine drugs were essentially one dimensional, with an evaluative factor accounting for most of the variance for data for each drug. Consequently, in the present study nine evaluative dimension scores were obtained, one for each drug, and these evaluative scores were used as dependent variables in further analysis using multivariate analysis of variance. The independent variable was classification of student in either high school or college.

Results

The multivariate test of significance was found to be statistically significant at the .01 level of confidence. Examination of statistics associated with the root show that statistical significance was obtained (Wilks' lambda = .86, $F = 5.09$, $p < .01$) while the canonical correlation ($C_c = .37$) indicates that results are moderately useful and practical.

Univariate F tests for nine dependent variables are shown in Table 2. Inspection of this table shows that college student and high school student attitudes differ significantly on LSD, cocaine, heroin, and amphetamine. Since statistical significance was obtained for differing attitudes toward these four drugs, further analysis of mean differences seems appropriate. These results are shown in Table 3. In each case results appear to indicate that high school students have a more benign view of these four substances than do college students. This finding is not in agreement with the implications of previously cited literature (Levy, 1973; Rice, 1981).

Conclusions

The relatively favorable attitude toward LSD, cocaine, heroin, and amphetamine which was displayed by high school students may reflect their immaturity and lack of experience. College students may be becoming more sophisticated and less naive regarding dangers associated with drug use. The fact that no statistically significant differences were were found for the most commonly used drugs, alcohol and marijuana, may reflect societal views regarding the social acceptability and wide acceptance of marijuana and alcohol use current among diverse segments of society. Another factor which may be involved is the increasingly frequent use of these drugs by younger people. Further studies should explore these relationships.

TABLE 1

Target Words for Each Administrator: Alcohol, LSD, Marijuana, Cocaine, Valium®, Heroin, Hashish, Opium, & Amphetamine

*Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Painful
**Unsociable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sociable
*Serious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Humorous
*Gentle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cruel
**Awkward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Graceful
Active	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Passive
*,**Rigid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Flexible
Bright	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dark
*,**Sad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Happy
*Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Tense
Masculine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Feminine
Hot	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cold
*,**Complex	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Simple
Strong	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Weak

*Adjective-pairs contributing to the evaluative score.

**Adjective-pairs transposed for computational purposes.

TABLE 2

Univariate F - Ratios for Attitudes Toward Drugs

Variable	Hypothesized SS	Error SS	Hypothesized MS	Error MS	F
Alcohol	3.84	310.48	3.84	1.06	3.63
LSD	7.76	278.21	7.76	.95	8.20**
Marijuana	.13	468.97	.13	1.00	.08
Cocaine	6.88	381.87	6.88	1.30	5.30*
Valium®	2.22	389.69	2.22	1.33	1.67
Heroin	16.41	250.37	16.41	.85	19.26**
Hashish	4.83	404.30	4.83	1.38	3.51
Opium	3.10	341.65	3.10	1.16	2.67
Amphetamine	10.47	316.44	10.47	1.08	9.73**

*Statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

**Statistically significant at the .01 level of confidence.

TABLE 3

Mean Evaluative Scores for LSD, Cocaine, Heroin, and Amphetamine

Variable	Classification	
	High School Means	College Means
LSD	4.92	5.17
Cocaine	4.48	4.81
Heroin	4.82	5.15
Amphetamine	4.42	4.67

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